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SUBJECT: USAU: FURTHERING COUNTERNARCOTICS COOPERATION IN AFRICA

This message is from USAU Ambassador Michael A. Battle.

¶1. (SBU) Summary: Since the start of the year, USG and African Union Commission (AUC) officials on several levels have been discussing the problem of drugs being trafficked through Africa on their way to Europe. On January 21, the two sides met at AU headquarters to launch technical discussions about possible cooperation to combat drug trafficking in Africa. Subsequently, the issue of counternarcotics cooperation came up during AU Chairperson Jean Ping's January 31 meeting with Under Secretary Otero and Assistant Secretary Carson on the margins of the AU Summit, and during AU Commissioner for Peace and Security Ramtane Lamamra's February 10 meeting with the U.S. Africa Command (AFRICOM) Commander General Ward during his visit to Ethiopia. End Summary.

¶2. (SBU) On January 21, the AUC and counternarcotics experts from INL and AFRICOM met at AU headquarters to discuss areas of possible cooperation to combat drug trafficking in Africa. Commissioner for Social Affairs Advocate Bience Gawanas led the AU delegation comprised of social, political, and security department representatives. Participants reviewed drug trafficking trends on the continent and efforts by the AU and its international partners to combat this scourge. According to AU officials, cannabis is the principal drug consumed on the continent and it threatens food security. They described cannabis a "gateway" drug that could lead to the growing addiction to harder drugs, such as cocaine and heroin. AU experts called for alternative crops that could be as profitable as cannabis, and they expressed concern about the lack of drug counseling and treatment on the continent. The meeting yielded the following joint statement:

BEGIN TEXT OF STATEMENT

The African Union Commission (AUC) and a United States Government (USG) delegation of counternarcotics experts met on January 21, 2010 in African Union Headquarters. The discussion focused on areas of possible cooperation and collaboration to combat drug trafficking in Africa. There was a recognition that a balanced and integrated approach to drug control, cutting across issues of social, economic, and peace and security is necessary. Furthermore, there was broad consensus that drug trafficking threatens African security, good governance, development, and public health.

Strengthening African institutions, to include criminal

justice and security sector institutions, are fundamental to our joint counternarcotics objectives. Additionally, the group recognized the role a robust anti money laundering regime, covering a wide range of predicate offenses, must play in effectively countering the threat of drug trafficking in Africa.

To this end, the following steps for immediately expanding this cooperation were identified:

- The AUC and the USG will identify and exchange focal points.
- The USG will provide the AUC with copies of the counternarcotics assessments completed to date.
- The AUC will provide the USG with specific themes related to counternarcotics that the USG can reinforce through bilateral interactions.
- The AUC will continue internal discussions on potential areas of AUC-USG cooperation and will present the conclusions of this discussion to the US Mission to the AUC.
- The AUC and the USG will continue the dialogue to explore further cooperation in support of objectives outlined in the AU Plan of Action on Drug Control and Crime Prevention, 2007-2012

END TEXT OF STATEMENT

¶3. (SBU) The AUC identified several immediate needs: enact and harmonize drug laws; establish regional counternarcotics units; create information sharing mechanisms; training and equipment; and work with partners in a coordinated manner.

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¶4. (SBU) On January 31, AUC Chairperson Ping raised the issue of narcotrafficking with the U.S. delegation led by U/S Otero and A/S Carson on the margins of the AU Summit. "The situation in West Africa is very complex," Ping asserted, citing the linkages between drugs and terrorism. Given the fragility of African states, Ping said it was "almost impossible to fight (the drug problem) alone." In some instances, African politicians are fearful of their militaries' reaction to any attempt at a crackdown. Ping assessed that European authorities are not doing enough to combat drug trafficking.

¶5. (SBU) AFRICOM Commander General Ward brought up the issue during his February 10 meeting with AU Commissioner for Peace and Security Lamamra. Recalling a September 2009 meeting at AU Headquarters during which Chairperson Ping sought USG assistance to combat the drug traffic, General Ward acknowledged that the January 21 technical discussions had occurred, and advised Lamamra that AFRICOM would continue to work with the Department of State and other USG agencies to address the problem. General Ward maintained that the drug traffic was not limited to West Africa and thus counternarcotics efforts needed to be broad. Those efforts should encompass the AU's maritime strategy adopted at the recent AU Summit, he added.

Comment:

¶6. (SBU) Now that the dialogue is under way and commitments have been made by both sides to expand cooperation, the AUC must now hold internal discussions that will yield their requirements for capacity building. For example, the AUC may propose to implement the African Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance; legal models on counternarcotics issues for member states to incorporate into domestic legislation; and procedures and processes to monitor and ensure member state compliance of UN conventions and AU policies. The aim of these steps would be to minimize corruption and provide the legal tools to effectively combat organized crime, to include drug trafficking. The USG, meanwhile, needs to determine possible funding sources and how best to operationalize the new Regional Security Training

Center in West Africa.
YATES